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DURHAM, N.H. -- Hundreds of middle school students will pack Johnson Theatre at the University of New Hampshire March 16 to celebrate Music in the Schools Month with a concert designed just for them by music professor and pianist Christopher Kies.



2002 Postage Stamp Featuring
Ogden Nash

The entire Oyster River Middle School as well as students from the Exeter Area Cooperative Middle School and Newmarket Middle/High School will see a concert by the Granite State Symphony Orchestra that includes a piece composed by Kies to the animal poetry of Ogden Nash, a humorist and poet who was the first American chosen to grace the 37 cent postage stamp in 2002, the centennial of his birth.

The concert is free for every student thanks to a \$7,000 grant from the office of the vice president for research and public service at UNH.

“It's wonderful when anybody in the community does anything that brings an enriching experience to children in public schools,” ORMS Principal Marcia Ross said of the concert. “Then, when it's something of this size and caliber, and by someone with the excitement of Chris Kies, it's a wonderful opportunity for all children. I only wish that every school could have something like this to look forward to for Music in the Schools month.”

The production has a real grassroots feel to it. Kies' interest in composing for young people grew out of his relationship with his three daughters. Several graduates of the UNH music department are teaching in the schools invited to the concert. Oyster River Middle School chorus teacher and UNH graduate Beth Struthers will sing several songs during the concert in preparation for Kies' orchestral piece. It “borrows” tunes, meaning listeners will hear strains of everything from Ode to Joy and Rock a Bye Baby to The Girl from Ipanema and Tea-for-Two.

“Modern and classical music can be esoteric, not user friendly,” Kies says when asked why he composes for children. “When I was in college writing pieces, the arbitrary nature of it bothered me. I like to have a reason for doing something, and what could be better than introducing children to music and an orchestra? Borrowing other composers' melodies allows people to recognize something in what they are hearing, and it's a way of preserving the culture.”

Kies composed this piece after an earlier one frustrated him. The Amazing Bone, based on one of Kies' and his daughters favorite books by William Steig and written for the trombone (think of

the voice of the teacher in Charlie Brown) and piano, debuted in 2001. “It was a successful piece and the kids loved it, but the publisher requires payment of \$100 every time it is performed,” he said. “That might not sound like a lot, but it is when you have no funding.”

That's when he decided to do something with narration and music that was in the public domain, or controlled by a more relaxed publisher. Long an admirer of *Carnival of the Animals*, which features Ogden Nash's poetry alongside the music of Camille Saint-Saens, Kies decided to choose 12 other poems about animals by Nash and add music to them. Most importantly, Nash's publisher said that if Kies didn't charge admission to the performance, there would be no fee attached.

This concert is not open to the public so as many students as possible can participate, but a week later Kies has organized a performance by Colonial Brass, the brass quintet of the Band of Liberty from Hanscom Air Force Base that is free and open to the public. This event is special in that all the students and parents from Moharimet and Mast Way elementary schools have been invited to attend. The concert will be held Tuesday, March 23, at 7 p.m. in the Granite State Room in the Memorial Union Building on campus.